

ECAPAPA POLICY BRIEF SERIES
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Seed Certification, October 2003

Background

The harmonization of seed policies and regulation in the ASARECA¹ member countries is the first step toward creating a seed market that is large enough to attract investment by local and international investors who will provide the quantity, quality and variety of improved seed to meet the region's growing demands.

Since September 1999, ASARECA² with backing from USAID has supported a pilot project through ECAPAPA³ in the East African Community (EAC) countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda on five specific areas, namely

- phytosanitary regulations
- seed certification
- plant variety protection
- laws and regulations governing the seed trade
- variety evaluation, release and registration.

Each of these areas is the subject of a policy brief

The State of Seed Certification in 1999

The project found wide differences in the regulations and procedures for seed certification constraining germplasm exchange and formal seed trade in the EAC. For example, it was not clear which crops were subject to compulsory instead of voluntary certification. The field and laboratory standards and seed classes differed within the region limiting germplasm exchange while Uganda lacked provisions for accreditation and certification for institutions and companies in the seed industry. The lack of interagency certification prevented the possibility of seed produced in a country to be certified by an authority in that country before being transferred across border for further

¹ Burundi, D.R. Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda.

² ASARECA is the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa based at Entebbe in Uganda.

³ ECAPAPA is the Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agriculture Policy Analysis and a programme of ASARECA.

processing and certification. The lack of common tags for similar types of seed caused delays and confusion at the borders, further limiting regional seed trade. The project also found the national governments accepting informal seed trade in varying degrees, with some being more accepting than others. The failings restricted formal trade in certified seed, and discouraged investment in clean seed production to the disadvantage of seed users.

Activities of the ECAPAPA Pilot Project

The pilot project adopted a long consultative process beginning with the appointment of national resource persons between August and September 1999 to review the laws, regulations and standards in each country that was followed national consultative workshops with stakeholders in October and November 1999. These were followed by national workshops that presented proposals for regional harmonization to top-level public and private sector seed industry players in February to March 2000. The process culminated in the first regional workshop in April 2000 in Entebbe on the harmonization of proposals for phytosanitary regulations, seed certification and variety evaluation and registration; followed by the second one in June 2000 in Arusha on proposals for import-export procedures and coordination in implementing and monitoring regional agreements.

Results of the Project

The agreements resulting from the workshops could be characterized as either *legal* or *procedural*. The legal agreements are those requiring changes in national legislation in consultation with the agriculture and food security committee at the EAC. The procedural ones are those not requiring legislation and can therefore be implemented immediately by the national ministries of agriculture or certifying agencies. Most of the recommendations were both procedural and legal. The ministries of agriculture and national certifying agencies (NCA) would require some crops to have compulsory⁴ instead of voluntary⁵ certification removing doubts about seeds classified as voluntary in country and compulsory in another; harmonize field and laboratory standards for selected seeds⁶ increasing transparency in the process; classify seeds into four common classes⁷ from eight for the 10 crops under compulsory certification; and establish an interagency certification scheme that would facilitate movement of bulk seed across borders⁸ allowing seed companies to operate freely in the region. Other procedural measures to be undertaken by the NCAs include accrediting institutions, seed companies and individuals

⁴ Compulsory certification would be required for hybrid maize, open-pollinated maize, sweet corn, common dry bean, snap bean, sorghum, whet, rice, sunflower any other crop approved by regional certifying agencies

⁵ Voluntary certification would be recommended for tomato, carrot, cassava, pigeon pea, cowpea, and similar crops.

⁶ These were hybrid maize, sweet corn, open-pollinated maize, common bean, snap bean, rice and wheat.

⁷ The classes are i) breeders, ii) basic, iii) certified (first and second generations), iv) standard.

⁸ The final processing and certification is undertaken by cooperating certification agency.

to carry out seed certification on behalf of national certifying agencies⁹, and developing common seed tags for each seed class. The governments would come to terms with informal seed trade, accepting it as an integral part of the seed sector, building confidence among seed users of its ability to supply clean seed, and creating the enabling environment for it to graduate into formal trade. Finally, the agreed on standards for certification within the EAC were to be comparable to those of the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Next Steps¹⁰

The most important outcome of this project on seed certification is to show that agreement on and implementation of common standards, classes, seed tags and procedures for the EAC region is essential to building strong domestic seed markets. The recommendations above should hasten seed movement across borders, remove doubts on seed quality and class, expand seed markets across the region, and result in a reliable supply of clean seed to the region's farmers and communities. When fully implemented, the region's farmers and communities will benefit immensely from readily available certified seed on formal and informal markets from public and private seed producers that is uniformly clean throughout the region. Increased demand for clean seed will stimulate private sector investment, raise yields and incomes, and ultimately improve food security in the region. The experience of the EAC countries will be used to extend the pilot phase of this project to the other ASARECA member countries. There are plans to initiate the same consultative process in Burundi, D.R. Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Rwanda and Sudan.

⁹ Using common procedures in all three countries

¹⁰ Further information can be obtained from ECAPAPA Coordinating Unit, P.O. Box 765, Entebbe. Uganda. Tel 256 41 321751/2, 321780; Fax 256 41 321777 or email: ecapapa@imul.com.